

English 307 (Fall 2015)
Dr. Justin M. Pfefferle
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Tuesday & Friday, 2:00-3:15
Office Hours: Wednesday, 12:00-4:00
Office: J710

Media and Intermediation in the Twentieth-Century Novel

Course Description:

The novel in the twentieth century developed alongside other communications technologies, including photography, radio, telephony, cinema, television, and the Internet. This course will trace the evolution of the modern novel within the context of a broad media ecology, where novelists came to understand their literary output as part of a culture defined—and, potentially, threatened—by emergent ways of transmitting information. By its nature a hybrid form, the novel has always accounted for multiple media, genres, and discourses. In the twentieth century, the novel came not merely to acknowledge the existence of other media, but to understand itself as part of an intermediary environment that students who take this class will be invited to explore.

Over the course of the term, we will encounter exemplary novels of the media age. As well as heightening our appreciation of the dominant literary form of the twentieth century, we will acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the various ways that media interact with one another when they compete for our attention as individuals and members of social, political, and cultural orders.

Learning Outcomes:

Acquire a vocabulary and habits of mind with which to situate literary texts in their social and historical contexts, as well as their place in the media environment.

Learn to think critically and carefully about the relationship between different media and the social, cultural, and aesthetic implications that relationship entails.

Initiation into the contemporary climate of inter-disciplinarity; critical tools to understand better the limitations and possibilities of thinking across different media and disciplinary boundaries.

Introduction to the research skills and practices needed to think about literary texts in the context of non-literary media and information technologies.

Texts:

Amis, Martin. *London Fields* (1989). Vintage, 2005.
Conrad, Joseph. *The Secret Agent* (1907). Penguin Classics, 2007.
Fitzgerald, Penelope. *Human Voices* (1980) (Radio)
Greene, Graham. *The Third Man* (1950). Penguin (Non-Classics), 2007
Highsmith, Patricia. *Strangers on a Train* (1950)
Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita* (1955)
Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)

Spark, Muriel. *Memento Mori* (1959)

Evaluation:

Participation: 10%

Active, engaged, collaborative participation is crucial to the experience of a humanities education. Together, we will foster an environment of mutual learning and mutual teaching.

Critical Questions: 20%

Prior to the start of each week, **starting week three**, students will post two critical questions related to the readings for upcoming lectures and class discussions online. These questions will help to guide conversations, and function as an archive of the collective concerns of our intellectual community.

Short Essay: (3-4 pages, 800-1000 words) 20%

The short essay will invite students to perform a close reading of a scene or short passage in a particular novel. It will give students an opportunity to begin crafting an idea that may be developed in the final essay, and must be written in formal, polished, analytical prose. The short essay may be exploratory in nature. By the same token, it must occupy a formal register, and will be evaluated on the basis of its economy and clarity of language, precision of thought, and sophistication of analysis.

Due: Friday 16 October 2015

Essay Proposal (300-500 words) 20%

The objective of the essay proposal will be to construct the foundation for the final essay, and solicit feedback that will help you develop your ideas into a persuasive, argumentative paper. The proposal should introduce a question, or set of questions, as well as a tentative thesis statement that will serve as a foundation from which to organize the final essay.

Due: 6 November 2015

Final Essay: (5-6 pages, 1200-1500 words) 30%

The final essay will require that students complement textual explication with a sustained assessment of the relevant formal, historical, theoretical, and philosophical concepts at stake in the course as a whole. The paper must situate an analysis of a particular novel (or novels) within the context of the critical conversations that the supplementary readings represent.

Due: 4 December 2015

Class Schedule

Week One: Media, Intermediation, and the Modern(ist) Novel

- Sensory overload: living in an age of too much information
- The novelist as information expert
- Intermediation vs. Trans-mediation

Week Two: Photography and the Photographic Novel

- Semiotics: signs and signifiers; symbols, indices, and icons
- What constitutes the photographic?

- Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (1907)

Week Three: The Photographic Novel, continued

- Photo-bombs: cameras as weapons
- Spying, intrigue, epistemology: what does a photograph “prove”?
- Verloc’s pornographic photos: indecent images/indecent ideas

Week Four: The Radiophonic Novel

- Trojan Horses: treachery, propaganda, modern warfare
- Acousmatic Sound and the Auditory Uncanny: Humphrey Jennings’ *The Silent Village* (1943)
- Penelope Fitzgerald, *Human Voices* (1980)

Week Five: The Radiophonic Novel, Continued

- Jairmany Calling, Jairmany Calling: Lord Haw-Haw’s WWII Radio Propaganda
- Panic broadcasts: Orson Welles, “The War of the Worlds” (1940)
- Disembodied voices and novelistic form

Week Six: The Telephonic Novel

- Connective Sociability
- Missed Connections/Broken Connections
- Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori* (1959)

Week Seven: The Novel in the Age of Intermediation

- Mobile information
- Traveling theory
- Patricia Highsmith, *Strangers on a Train* (1950)

Week Eight: The Novel in the Age of Intermediation, Continued

- Primary Media/Secondary Media
- Adapted narrative
- Film Screening: Alfred Hitchcock, *Strangers on a Train* (1951)

Week Nine: The Cinematic Novel

- Intersemiotic translation: the novel for a film environment
- Sewers; or, is cinema the unconscious of the modern novel?
- Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (1950)

Week Ten: The Cinematic Novel, Continued

- Paratexts, authorship, authority
- Graham Greene, “The Third Man” (Screenplay 1949)
- Film Screening: Carol Reed, *The Third Man* (1949)

Week Eleven: The Novel and Mass Media

- Vulgarity
- Originals and copies; copies with no originals
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

Week Twelve: The Novel and Mass Media, Continued

- The afterlives of media
- What do images want?
- Film Screening: Stanley Kubrick, *Lolita* (1962)

Week Thirteen: Multi-media, Paranoia, and the Postmodern Novel

- (Un)intelligible communication
- Mono-directionality/Multi-directionality
- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)

Week Fourteen: The Televisual Novel

- Getting on television
- Made-for-TV: *darts* and the televisual event
- Martin Amis, *London Fields* (1989)

Week Fifteen: The Televisual Novel, continued

- Postmodernism, mass-culture, and kitsch
- Watching television in public and private
- Genre Trouble: the foil, the cheat, the murderess, and the narrator

Final Remarks

- Looking forward to the modernist past
- The novel and the Internet
- What are the legacies of the twentieth-century novel?

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Unless you have cleared it with me, failure to attend more than three times will result in your being asked to withdraw from the class.

Late Work:

Due dates are non-negotiable. Although I will accept late work, I will dock a half-letter grade per day late. Thus, a paper that is one day late that would have received an A will receive an A-. Two days late: B+. And so on.

College ADA Policy

Students with documented physical, learning, psychological and other disabilities are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations. If you need classroom or testing accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (Student Union Building, Room 205, 257-3020). The DRC will provide forms verifying the need for accommodation. As soon as the instructor receives the form, you will be provided with the appropriate accommodations. Students are encouraged to request accommodations as close to the beginning of the semester as possible.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in their college work. Cheating, forgery, and plagiarism are serious offenses, and students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action.

If a student has any question about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, it is that student's responsibility to clarify the matter by conferring with the instructor and to seek out other resources available on the campus. The link regarding plagiarism on the Sojourner Truth Library's website is an excellent beginning:
<http://lib.newpaltz.edu/assistance/plag.html>

Technology Policy:

There will be more than enough media active at any given time during class-time. As such, I will not be allowing any other technologies: laptops, tablets, and cell phones must be stowed away in bags, or—even better—left out of the room entirely.